

by David Farmer

*with a foreword by Dr Geoff Sharman,
Chairman of the Parish Council*

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Foreword by Dr Geoff Sharman, Chairman of the Parish Council.

Those of us who live in Olivers Battery have come to love the place because of its high setting between city and countryside, its rural landscape views and the opportunities it provides for walking and observing wildlife. But, no less than this, Olivers Battery also has a rich historical setting which stretches from Roman times, through the Middle Ages and into the Twentieth Century.

The origin of the name itself recalls the Civil War, even though the evidence may be doubtful. Another notable highlight is the Saxon bronze bowl excavated in 1932 and now held on permanent display in the British Museum. Every family should plan to see this treasure which must be at least as worthwhile as a visit to the Millenium Dome!

David Farmer has splendidly captured the panorama in this History of Olivers Battery and, with help from some of our longer established residents, has also recaptured the more recent period when Olivers Battery was a separate community, distinct from Winchester, with its own social life, lively political debate and well known characters: a spirit which continues into the new century. It's a good read and I hope you will all enjoy it!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OLIVER'S BATTERY

by David Farmer

THE PAST

Oliver's Battery stands on the eastern ridge of a chalk down which stands about 400 ft above sea level overlooking Winchester and St Catherine's Hill. Excavations on the site of the Battery by the Hampshire Field and Archaeological Society between 1930 to 1932 have revealed a rich past occupation of the land around the Battery.

The first evidence of human occupation is from about 800 BC where fragments of pottery have shown that it was inhabited by hill folk who lived on the high ground for ease of defence. The earthwork itself is believed to have been built by the Romans around 43AD. They set up camp here building the fortifications as a look-out post as they watched over their road construction. The hill top is equidistant from two key military Roman roads, Winchester [Venta Belgarum] to Old Sarum and Winchester to Bittern [Clausentum] and they would have watched over the road construction works in the beginning and then as a look-out for invaders.

The most significant find of the 1930s excavations was the grave of a Saxon chief dating from about 550AD about a hundred years after the Romans left Britain. The location of this grave was roughly between where Downlands Road and Crescent Close are today. He was probably the leader of a band of Anglo-Saxons attacking Winchester. He was buried in a solitary shallow grave with a great bronze bowl resting on his chest. The bowl was gilded and decorated with silver escutcheons. It is a magnificent example and indicates the importance of the person who was buried. The bowl is now in the British Museum, with a replica in the Winchester City museum.

We now come to the time when Oliver's Battery got its name. From at least 1808 it is shown on maps as Oliver Cromwell's Battery as it was thought that the earth works had been flung up by Cromwell's troops when they were attacking Royalist Winchester in September 1645. Although legend tells that this is where Cromwell's troops fired the cannon at the Cathedral, ballistics of that time could not reach that far and in all probability, the troops used it as conveniently situated fortification to withdraw to overnight. The area probably used to fire the cannon would have been where the A&E department of the Hospital is now. Another find in the 1930s excavations was in a round barrow close to the Battery in which there were many skeletons of men stripped of their clothes and possessions and buried in haste. These are thought to be victims of a skirmish between Roundheads and Cavaliers that is recorded to have happened between Winchester and Hursley in April 1645 where the Royalists were routed. The barrow itself dates back to 7-800BC, judged by the pottery that was found in it.

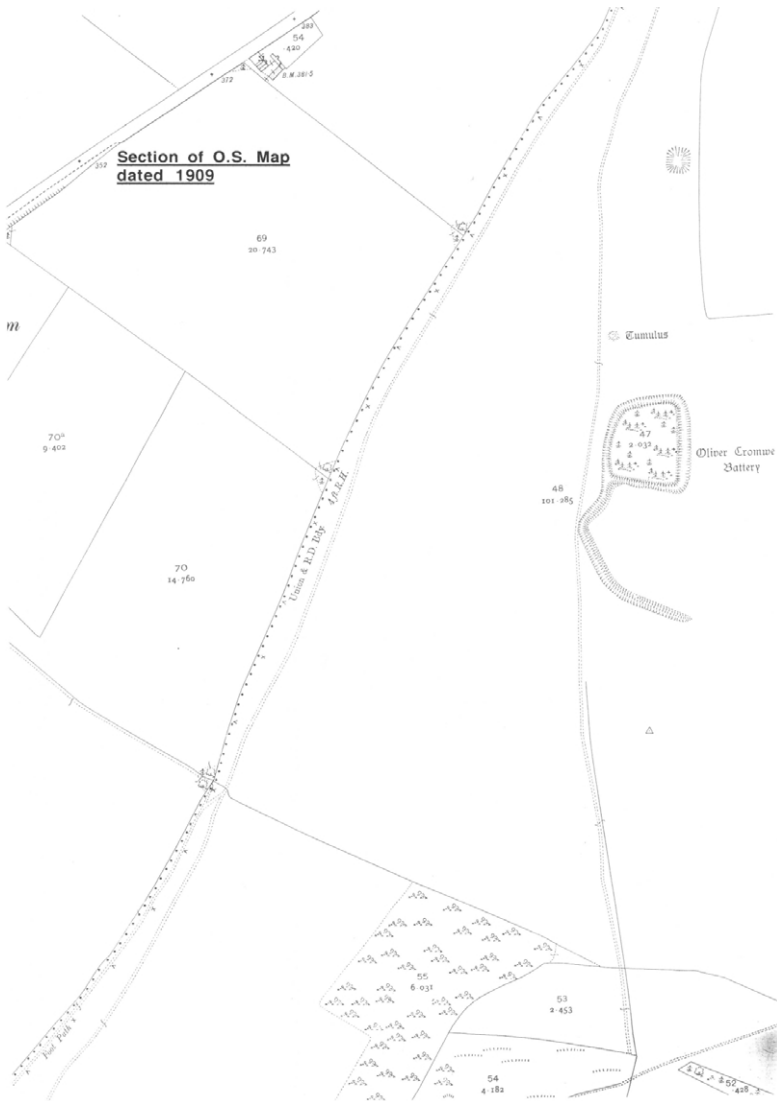
Over the years on maps, the Cromwell has been dropped and now the area is known as Oliver's Battery.

THE PRESENT

We now come to the present day and how our community has developed over the years.

In the 1909 Ordnance Survey map no habitation is shown in the area, except for a dwelling and Kennels and Kennels Cottages either side of Port Lane. (1909 Map which is shown does not include this, as it appears on the next section below the shown section.) In the first OS Map of 1872 Kennels Cottages are not shown and the dwelling and Kennels are shown as Yew Hill Farm.

The next map to be published is 1932 which shows a likeness to the Oliver's Battery we know today. The reason that no maps were published between these two dates was the First World War. The foundations of the community were laid down during the first World War. The ground that makes up the Battery was used as a Remount depot by the Royal Veterinary Corps which would explain why some residents have had problems with subsidence where foundations have been laid over old horse pits. According to the RVC regulations these pits have to be of a set dimension of depth, length and width when burying dead horses.



**Section of O.S. Map
dated 1909**



One of the last First World War Barracks huts which was pulled down in May 1999

The older residents will remember the old barrack huts that were scattered about the Battery, relics of the first World War occupation of the area. There were about 22 of them that were converted by the County Council into living accommodation. These were used as houses for the smallholders who were the first residents of Oliver's Battery. Now nearly all these have been pulled down and houses built, but there are a few still standing.

After the first World War there was a scheme commonly called "an acre and a cow" for men coming back from the war to set themselves up in small holdings. This was run by the Ministry of Agriculture in conjunction with the County Council who owned the land, that now makes up Oliver's Battery. This is how the first residents (the smallholders) of Oliver's Battery came to be here. They first leased the land from the Hampshire County Council, then the County Council started to sell this

land to the existing smallholders in 1922 and by 1927 they had sold all the plots.

These original residents had a very hard life by today's standards. The only service they had was water and this very inadequate, no shops, the nearest being at the top of Winchester High St.. No transport, so everything had to be hand carried from Winchester, no school and no church.

From these 22 original barrack huts and the smallholders that occupied them the current community of Oliver's Battery was formed.

ROADS

In the beginning the main access into the Battery was a track that came off the Romsey Road at Stanmore Lane (the Stanmore Estate had not yet been started) and ran along the top of the chalk ridge. This became known locally as the White Road as in summer any vehicle that came along it sent out clouds of white dust.

In 1936 a tarmac road with pavements and drainage was laid between Stanmore Lane and the city boundary (you can still see the stone marking the boundary in OB road south) at a cost of £1893. Up to this time all roads in the Battery were just stone tracks. These tracks which are shown on the 1932 map were laid down during the First World War (It is said by German prisoners of war.) and were very substantial, using granite blocks. People who had to dig them up before the advent of mechanical diggers had a very hard time. These roads were gradually made up mostly after the second World War. These were what the council term unadopted roads and as each was made up, the local residents were charged for the cost, according to the length of the ground that bordered the road. Some of

the original tracks were not made up till the mid 1970s and some like Seldon Close are still in the original state.



Mountview Road 1974

Oliver's Battery Road from the city boundary stone was like this and the first bus services used to turn at Downlands Road as the road was too rough. Until this part of Oliver's Battery Road was made up there was a gate across the road that always remained open, between the city boundary stone and the path to Mountview Road. This is thought to be the original entrance gate to the RVC camp. When the rest of Oliver's Battery Road was made up the residents did not have to pay for the road as it was established that this was an original track, as can be seen on the 1909 OS map.

Another interesting track is shown on the 1909 OS map that went from the corner of Stanmore Lane along the now Golf

Course and Oliver's Battery boundary. This is rumoured to be the original road to Hursley, before the Romsey road was built. It is said that Port Lane which is a continuation of Old Kennels Lane to Hursley got its name because there was a toll at the entrance to Hursley, but I can find no evidence of this. In fact in Milne's Atlas of Hampshire dated 1791 the track and the Romsey Road are shown with a toll at Standon just before Hursley on the Romsey Road, so I don't think the rumour is true. It is also said that Port Lane and Whiteshute Ridge formed the route used when King Rufus' body was brought back from the New Forest to Winchester.





Corner of Old Kennels Lane and Oliver's Battery Road late 1950's. Known locally as Eatwell's Corner, after the resident who kept a chicken farm on the site.

Up until 1954 there were no recognised road names, houses were known by a name and a number Oliver's Battery. In this year names were assigned to various roads like Downlands, Mountview, Old Kennels Lane and Oliver's Battery Crescent. Roads like Oliver's Battery Road and Compton Way were retained as this was the name they were known by at the time.

Old Kennels Lane got its name because of the kennels for the Hursley Hunt that were in the grounds of the now Old Kennels Cottage. The brick bases of these Kennels can still be seen in the grounds.



Old Kennels Lane Winter 1962-63

Mountview Road had its name changed as the residents at the time objected to the given name of Pitt View Road. Most other roads have developed as small holdings were sold off and Closes built. Braeside and Sunnydown for instance, are named after the properties that stood on that area which would have been one of the original army huts. Other local names are now lost. For instance, the sharp corner in Old Kennels Lane, where there is a private road to no's 10 and 12 Old Kennels Lane, was known as Pitt Corner.

Another interesting piece of information to come out of documents held in the Hampshire Record Office was the great controversy of the placing of a barrier across Mountview Road

and Seldon Close by some of the residents of Seldon Close in 1953. The residents of Seldon Close erected the barrier to stop builder's lorries using the road as a short cut into Mountview Road. At this time Seldon Close was a turning off Oliver's Battery Road. A court case resulted because of the erection of the barrier. Held on 4 Aug 1953, residents Mr W. J. Burden and a Mr Peake were charged with obstruction. They won their case proving that Seldon Close was a road owned by the residents that had been divided from Mountview Road by a fence that had been removed in 1942 and not been replaced after the war, but as 20 years had not elapsed since its removal then no right of way could be established, therefore they had the right to erect the barrier.

This did not end the controversy as there was then a protracted dispute over the use of the lane between the barrier and Oliver's Battery Road by lorries. At this time the lane by the barrier leading to Oliver's Battery Road was wide enough to drive through. I am told that some of the houses at the barrier end of Mountview Road have access via the lane in their deeds.

SERVICES AND UTILITIES

At first the only utility on the Battery was water and this was not adequate to supply the small holders with their needs. As the area is high, it was difficult to get any pressure to the water supply. To maintain adequate supplies large holding tanks were built; these are shown on the 1932 Ordnance Survey map. Gradually over the years the main water supply was improved by building reservoirs at a higher level like the one at Yew Hill. There was no mains drainage, only cess pits. Mains drainage was not installed to the majority of properties on the Battery till 1969-70.

Gas was the first utility to be installed in the mid 1930s, but the first gas main only fed houses along Oliver's Battery Road and some householders who lived near by paid to have spurs run off from this supply. So as you can see the first purpose built houses to be built in the 1920s to mid 1930s only had mains water and then as gas became available houses were lit by gas.

Electricity became available in 1938/39, but only to the houses along Oliver's Battery Road. Plans were passed at this time to supply the rest of the Battery by the overhead supply system we have today but, because of the second World War, most houses were not connected to the main electricity supply to well after the end of the war. Some of the original barrack huts that were used by the small-holders were not connected to mains electricity until the mid 1950s and some never. There was one property that stood where Treble Close now stands which did not have any utilities whatsoever. It was occupied by a gentleman up to the late 1960s.

SHOPS

Originally there was no shop the nearest Post Office was in Romsey Road which is now part of the County Arms pub and the nearest shops at the top of the High Street in Winchester. There was no bus service so residents had to walk both ways, coming back up hill carrying baskets of shopping. Sometime in the late 1920s a bus service was started that ran from Winchester to Romsey and this helped to get people backwards and forward to Winchester. Also, there was a service that served the Stanmore estate. The Stanmore estate was started soon after the finish of the First World War, and the first houses were occupied in 1921.

Also in the 1920s a bungalow was built just about where the

service road is for the current shops. This bungalow became the shop and Post Office. (It can be seen on the 1932 O/S map almost opposite the Church Hall. Also if you look at the 1929 photo of the Church Hall it can be seen just to the left of the Hall.) It eventually added a Off Licence. The shop and Post Office area were very small as it was just a room of the bungalow. If you had two people in, it was crowded.

I am told there was a side door to the bungalow with a stable door that people would knock on in the evening to be served drinks from the off-licence through the top half. There was also a shed at the back where paraffin was kept, as this was used to heat many of the houses. People would leave their can and money on the way to work, they would be filled during the day and left outside for people to collect on their way home. In the early 1950s, before many houses had refrigerators the shop would open as a special concession from 12-12.30 on a Sunday afternoon for the sale of ice cream, as Walls installed a Freezer. The shop had several owners the last being Mrs Jarvis who still lives in Oliver's Battery.

The current shops were not built until the early 1960s and the ones opposite until the late 60s. While the shops were being built the shop operated from a corrugated iron shed which was housed right on the road, about where the post box and telephone box are now.

SCHOOLS

The current Oliver's Battery school was opened in 1973. Before this most children from Oliver's Battery attended Hursley school, via a school bus and some attended Stanmore. In the early days children attended the school at Compton and used to walk both ways along the foot paths. With the opening of

Oliver's Battery school parents had a choice as to which school they sent their children. Most of the children that were attending Hursley continued to do so, but any new children went to Oliver's Battery, although you could still opt to go to Hursley. The school bus service to Hursley ceased in the late 1970s.

CHURCH

St Mark's church was opened in 1956; before this people attended Compton, St. Cross and Pitt church, which is now a house. I have had older residents tell me in the past, of funerals where the coffin was carried from the Battery to Pitt along the footpath that runs from Old Kennels Lane to Pitt. This footpath was slightly altered when the Golf course was built. It used to run through Pitt Manor Farm and come out opposite the road to Pitt village and church. Where St. Mark's now stands used to be a church/village hall where all the social events took place.

Around 1925 the small-holders got together on the holding of a Mr. Pryor to plan the building of a village hall. They had plans drawn up, but as money was very tight they decided to purchase a hut as a temporary measure. This was an Army hut used during the First World War, that was removed from Morn Hill Camp and was purchased for the sum of £10 by the residents. It was lit by oil lamp and heated by an old army stove and stood on brick piers. The ground on which it stood was purchased from the estate of a Mr.F.W. Talbot who, I believe, lived at Pitt Manor Farm. It had been promised by him, but it was not mentioned in his will, so the executors sold the site at a nominal sum.

The hut was used for a variety of uses: men's club, children's club, mother and child, concerts, dances, whist drives, Sunday

school and church services in fact the centre of the then village life. As Oliver's Battery was part of St. Cross parish in those days, communicants went to St. Cross.



The old Church Hall after the storm in 1929

In In September 1929 a huge storm blew one end of the hut in, the other out and it was thought the damage was not repairable, but the then Master of St. Cross the Venerable Archdeacon Daldy, had other ideas and sought advice, and as a result the sides of the hut were secured by huge buttresses, the gable ends replaced and soon all the clubs, activities and the occasional church service and Sunday school were back in full swing.

When the Master of St. Cross died it was found that he had a private chapel in his rooms and its contents were given to the church hall. These consisted of a portable altar with dorsal curtains, a brass cross, candle sticks, flower vases, a picture and altar rails. A lean-to extension was built onto the side of

the hall to house these, that could be screened off from the hall when it was not required. I believe most of these items are still in use today in St. Mark's.



The Altar in the old Church Hall in its specially-build alcove

With the out break of the Second World War the hut was commandeered by the army and did not return to its previous uses until sometime after the end of the war. By now it was showing its age and deterioration. A great effort was made by the community to raise funds and a £1000 was raised. The Bishop donated another £1000 and the church commissioners another £2000, but even in those days the early 1950s £4000 would not go far, so it was decided to go for a prefabricated building as one had been erected successfully in Fordingbridge. The hut was sold off to a farmer who wanted it for a barn for

£30. The contents of the hall were distributed around the community until the new hall could be built. The altar was housed in the bungalow of Mr. R E Steel who lived at 21 Old Kennels Lane (this was demolished in about 1972). Some may remember the bungalow which was just after the bend at the top of Old Kennels Lane, which had a tennis court at the side. An article by the late Mr Steel is the source of most of the information on the church. He ran the Sunday school for many years. While there was no church, services were held at the bungalow.



Blessing the Chursh site 1956

In 1956 the Bishop of Southampton came to Oliver's Battery to bless the site and the Mayor of Winchester, a Mrs Thackeray, cut the first turf and so was born the current St. Mark's.

PARISH COUNCIL

In 1956 Oliver's Battery ceased to be part of Compton Parish and became a Parish in its own right, part of the then Winchester Rural District Council. The Hampshire record office holds copies of all meetings of the council from this time.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War saw a great deal of activity in the area in and around Oliver's Battery with many troops being housed in the fields surrounding the Battery. I have had one of the older residents tell me that a Scottish troop were stationed on the Battery itself and used to play the bagpipes every night. Also of tanks taking part in night manoeuvres charging along the tracks that are now roads keeping most people awake. Before 'D' day there were many troops, tanks and armoured vehicles in the fields surrounding the Battery waiting to embark at Southampton.

AFTER THE WAR

After the second World War (1939-45) the area started to change from a series of small-holdings with some permanent houses built here and there, to a total residential area, as small holdings were sold and houses built. Most of the small-holdings had disappeared by the end of the 1960s. You can still see some of the old huts and small holdings that still exist either side of the foot path that runs from the recreation ground to Yew Hill.

The most significant change that has happened to change how Oliver's Battery looked in the 1920-30s is the building of Badgers Farm Road and Badgers Farm Estate in 1977. The building of Badgers Farm Road meant that houses in Oliver's Battery Road had to be demolished. The original gateway into Oliver's Battery (now termed Oliver's Battery Road North) made into a cul-de-sac. Originally all traffic used this route via Stanmore Lane into the Battery. Older residents will remember the King Alfred's buses, which only went as far as the start of Old Kennels Lane where there was a turning circle and also being able to walk via the Battery and Downlands Road on to open down land with a panoramic view of Winchester stretched before you. I can remember taking my son tobogganing where Sainsburys now stands in the early 1970s.



View from Crescent Close towards where Badger Farm now stands 1975

Some residents have lived on the Battery for many years, some in the same houses they moved into in the early 1930s. There was one, a Mr Brewer, who lived at 2 Old Kennels Lane, who had lived on the Battery since 1921 and died in February 1999. Some of the original residents names were Chalk, Cox, Freeborn, Hobbs, Turner and Unsworth. Some, or their descendants, still live here.

As you can see Oliver's Battery was never initially planned, it just developed over the last 80 years, the original shape and roads being laid down in the First World War. For all its lack of initial planning it has turned out very well and an ideal place to live with all its amenities to hand. It has a range of excellent shops which include a Fishmonger/Greengrocer, a Butcher, a Post Office/Grocery and a DIY and Hardware. Sainsbury's Superstore within easy access with its attached Doctor's Surgery and Community Centre, a good local Primary/Junior school, with a good Comprehensive in Kings close at hand, easy access to the M3, a local bus service and a hospital and main line station within 2 to 3 miles. The only thing we lack is a pub.

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